

694. g. 16. 17
A
S E R M O N

Preached at

Conduit-Street Chapel, in the Parish of
St. GEORGE, *Hanover-Square*.

On SUNDAY, *February* the 1st, 1756,

Being the SUNDAY before the Day appointed for a
GENERAL FAST and HUMILIATION.

On Occasion of the

Late Dreadful EARTHQUAKES

AT

L I S B O N, and Elsewhere.

By the Rev. Mr. WINSTANLEY,
Rector of *Lanwenarth*, in *Monmouthshire*. R

L O N D O N:

Printed for A. and C. CORBETT, near *Temple-Bar*.

M.DCC,LVI. [Price Six-pence.]

S E R M O N

Preached at

the Parish of
St. Andrew, London.

On Sunday, the 16th of

August 1854, at the Anniversary of the
Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ.

By the Rev. Mr. Winstanley.

LONDON:

Printed for A. and C. Cochrane, 15, Abchurch Lane.

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St. LUKE, Chap. xiii. Verse 4, 5.

Or those Eighteen, upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were Sinners above all Men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

I tell you, nay: But except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

IN a self-sufficient Age, like this, when Reason fits sole Arbiter in religious Matters, and arrogantly condemns every Thing, which she cannot perfectly account for, on her own Principles; it is no very easy Task for a Minister of *Jesus Christ* so to preach, as neither to wound his *Conscience*, nor hazard his *Reputation*.

IF, believing it necessary that God should interpose in the *moral* World, he talks of the Holy Spirit assisting our
B Infirmities,

Infirmities, and of our not being *able of ourselves* to think or do *any Thing as of ourselves* ; — he is immediately stigmatized, or, at least suspected, for an *Enthusiast*. — If he presume to introduce the Almighty into the *natural* World ; suppose him but to interfere sometimes in the Conduct of his own Works ; and to direct such or such extraordinary Events to Purposes only known to himself ; then is he flatly charged with *Superstition*.

AND yet, if a Preacher of Righteousness, is entirely silent on these Heads ; nay, if he does not insist upon them again and again, and press them on the Minds of his Hearers ; how can he answer it to God and his own Heart ?

SHOULD he, for Example, never, or but seldom, speak of the Weakness of human Nature, nor plead the Necessity thence arising of *divine Succours* ; what Apology will he be able to render to his Lord and Master, who sent us the Holy Ghost to comfort us ? — Or if, when it pleases God to visit any of his Creatures with a more than *ordinary* Calamity, he is not ready to snatch the favourable Opportunity of inviting others to Repentance ; what Regard will he be thought to pay to an inspired Writer, who bids him to be *instant in Season and out of Season*, in the Cause of Virtue ?

PERSONS, it is true, who idolize their own Understandings, may possibly sneer at all this, — especially when we ascribe Things to *Providence*, which may well be accounted for in a *natural Way*.

BUT let such be reminded, that, whatever they may think of *Nature*, she is no more than a bare Instrument in the Hands of God; who has the same *Power over* her, as the *Potter* has *over his Clay*, to dispose and manage her at his Pleasure.

So that the most *common* Events we see, but which we are apt to overlook because they *are* common, are as truly, tho' not so immediately perhaps, the Operation of an all-powerful Hand, as any other Events we behold, though never so *miraculous* and *extraordinary*. — There is no Difference here in the *Cause*. — It is the same God in both Instances; however the *Effects* may vary, sometimes to cheer and comfort, sometimes to awaken and alarm us.

AND, although we cannot positively determine, — nor is it fit we should, — whether this or that calamitous Event is a *Judgment* sent from Heaven, or whether it is *not*; — yet, when Nature, or more properly the God of Nature I should say, departs from his *usual* Method of acting, and brings any *terrible Disaster* upon the Earth; — we cannot sure be so stupid as not to reflect seriously upon it; — not as Philosophers would do, who, after their utmost Pains,
may

may be still unable to *comprehend* it ; — but as Christians rather, who may, for aught they know, be nearly concerned therein ; and who consequently should take Occasion from thence to *consider of their Ways*, and to become less culpable at least, if not more exemplary and pious.

You cannot say it is *uncharitable*, if we call that a *Judgment* from above, whereby Thousands perish in a Moment, without Respect of Persons. — Uncharitable to the *Dead* it cannot be ; — for where is that Man, or Number of Men, let me ask, who do not *deserve* the like Fate ? — It is not uncharitable to the *Living* ; — for Judgments are a Summons to Repentance to every one, to whose Knowledge they are permitted to extend.

It must be owned, indeed, there are many Disorders in the World, which are easily accounted for in *Philosophy* ; —and, that such and such Causes will naturally, as we say, produce such and such Effects. — But then it must be owned at the same Time, that Men may talk of Nature till they forget the God of Nature ; — that they may be so far buried in *Science*, as to lose all Thoughts of *Religion*.

How much better is it, and more conformable to the Doctrines which *Christ* taught, to look upon *all Nature* as conducted by a *particular Providence*, and to believe the Supreme Being concerned in *every Thing* that is done under the Sun ?

SUCH

SUCH a Notion of Providence as this, cannot fail to inspire us all with the warmest Sentiments of Devotion ; — and is entirely agreeable to the Gospel, which assures us that the very Hairs of our Head are all numbered ; and that *not one of them falls to the Ground* without our heavenly Father's Permission.

TAKE away this awful Notion of the Deity, or this endearing Consideration of him, I should rather say, and we should want one principal Motive of *setting the Lord always before us.*

FOR though all Things point to an Almighty Agent ; — though the *Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy Work* ; — they only do so to a considering Mind. — The Careless and Unthinking must be *alarmed* into a Sense of God. — Some *extraordinary* Appearance must remind them, or they will soon forget, that he *ruleth and judgeth in the Earth.*

ACCORDINGLY it has pleased the kind and gracious Author of our Beings, to rouse the sleepy Attention of Mankind from Time to Time, by some sudden unexpected Blow ; — either as a *Judgment*, or a *Warning*, or both. — Which, whether he does it by immediately interposing *himself*, or by so ordering and constituting *Nature*, as that such and such Effects shall necessarily arise at this or that

Juncture, to serve such and such moral Ends, makes not the least Difference. Because in either Case a particular Providence is *equally* supposed, directly or indirectly employed for the Use and Happiness of Man.

THE Reasoners and Disputers of this World may say what they will of Nature, and dive into her most secret Recesses, to solve each occurring Difficulty. — But, after all they have done, or will ever be able to do, this Maxim will eternally hold good, *viz.* — that all the Evil and Misery we see in Life, is the certain Consequence of Sin; — and, if so, — that there never was a sore Disaster brought upon any People, or even upon any individual Person, which was not either designed as a *Punishment* due to Sin, or as a Means to *deter* Men from it.

AND thus much it seemed requisite to premise, before we entered upon the more immediate Subject of the Text. For, — such is the Pride and Sufficiency of Human Reason, — inasmuch as several Improvements and Discoveries have been made in the natural World, we can hardly be persuaded to admit the Agency of a *particular Providence*; as though Things were utterly void of all *moral* Tendency and Design, because they are capable of being solved in a *Philosophical* Manner.

TAKING

TAKING it for granted then, that all Nature works to fulfil the Intentions of Providence with respect to his rational Creatures; and, that she is frequently thrown into Disorders and Convulsions, in order to *warn* some, and to *punish* others: — It shall be my present Business to consider the two following *seasonable* Propositions, which are evidently implied in the Text; — and suitable to the melancholy Circumstances of many of our Christian Brethren.

FIRST. That God involves some in Misery, not because they *deserve* it more than others; but for Reasons of Government best known to himself. — *Or those Eighteen upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were Sinners above all Men that dwelt in Jerusalem? — I tell you, nay.*

SECONDLY. That notwithstanding the Exemption, whether of a few or many, from the Judgments which God may inflict, the present Forbearance of the Almighty, is no infallible Security for the future. — *But except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

FIRST then, I am to consider, that God involves some in Misery, not because they deserve it more than others, but for Reasons of Government best known to himself.

WHEN

WHEN some Persons informed our blessed Saviour of the *Galileans*, whose *Blood Pilate had mingled with their Sacrifices*, he does not take upon him to deny that this was a *Judgment* upon them for their heathenish and abominable Rites. — All he insinuates is this, — that they were *not Sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such Things*.

FOR your Edification and religious Instruction, I would willingly apply this Case to a late very mournful Instance of God's Dealings with Man, which is now quite fresh in our Memories, and cannot but have made too deep an Impression upon us to be easily forgot.

You may call it a *Judgment*, if you please, which has laid waste and buried in Ruins one of the most flourishing Cities in *Christendom* : — And you will possibly call it *right* : — For many heavy Calamities are *Judgments*. — But, if you should condemn the poor unhappy Sufferers in this dreadful Catastrophe, and think they were devoted to Destruction, as being more ripe in Wickedness than the rest of the World ; — you would be much too *blame*, — since nothing can suggest this Thought but an *uncharitable Spirit*.

WHAT ! shall we, like the proud Pharisee in the Gospel, who have such a *Score* of Sins to answer for, presume to charge others with a *heavier Load* of Guilt ? — Or
say

say we could justly boast of *superior Piety and Virtue*, shall we vainly draw an odious Comparison, when we know, or ought to know, that *all our Sufficiency is of God?* — Such a Procedure as this, my Brethren, would be extremely culpable in us, would indeed be an *Iniquity* very justly to be punished by the Judge. —

— THAT the Inhabitants of *Spain and Portugal* have been visited in a most awakening Manner, is an unquestionable Fact. — That they were a sinful People, and were visited as such, is no less certain. — But that they were greater Sinners than the rest of Mankind; or, that their Sins more loudly called for Vengeance, than the Sins of this, or any other Nation, is what we have no Grounds to assert, — God only knows.

Their dreadful Calamity has hitherto escaped us: — May we be truly thankful for it! — But while we are devoutly thankful for so signal a Mercy, let us not be unmindful of our own State, nor proudly fancy with ourselves, that we are less deserving of the same Visitation, or have less Reason to fear it. — *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy unmerited Goodness*, be it ascribed, that we are all here present this Day, to celebrate thy glorious Name, and were not destroyed in a Moment.

D
SAY

SAY not, I beseech you, nay, think it not, that the Ways of Providence are *wrong*, if he afflicts one particular People more than another, unless they have *displeased* him more. — Alas! my Brethren, you forget, — that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth*; — and *that even in Judgment he remembers Mercy*. — There is another Life, you are sensible, after this; — in which, if not before, the Justice of the Almighty will be *clearly* seen; — in which, Punishments will be exactly proportioned to Crimes; — and, in which, ample Recompence will be made to all those, who may possibly have *suffered more* in this World, than others who *deserved it more*.

BUT, setting aside a future State of Existence, God may surely punish *whom* he pleases, and to what *Degree* he pleases, and yet be *just*. — For the best Man upon Earth, is a Criminal in the Sight of Heaven; and, as such, can plead no Right of Exemption from any Sort of Evil whatsoever, which Heaven may think proper to inflict.

WE speak indeed of the *Innocent*; and, in common Language, we say, it is hard the Good should suffer with the Bad; — the Righteous with the Wicked; — the Innocent with the Guilty.

BUT, Who are the *Innocent*, let me ask? — Those only who are less *blameable* than others; — who have fewer Infirmities.

Infirmities to bewail, and *fewer* Transgressions to answer for. — These are the *innocent* Persons, and these only : — Innocent, you see, by Comparison, not strictly speaking. — Thus much can we fairly say, and no more, of the most *upright* and *perfect* Man.

WHENEVER therefore we behold the Hand of the Almighty stretched out to smite any of his Creatures, all we ought to conclude is this, — that the *Judge of all the Earth* has done Right, because they *merited* his Resentment. — Whether they deserved it *more*, or whether they deserved it *less*, than others, would ill become *us* to enquire, — much more to determine.

YET granting the Innocent were to suffer, — the Innocent *properly* so named, — could such be found in the World ; — there would be nothing here to complain of ; — since, as we before observed, this seeming Piece of Injustice may be infinitely more than recompensed in a State of Retribution.

FROM whence it plainly appears, that the Calamities, in which a People may be involved, are no Proof of their being more immersed in Vice, and consequently more ripe for Destruction, than we ourselves. — All they prove is this ; — the superintending Care of Providence ; who suffers Men to undergo the severest Trials, not because they are
more

more wicked than others, but for Reasons of Government best known to himself; — one amongst which may be, to deter us from Sin, when all other Motives fail.

THUS have Thousands of the Inhabitants of Spain and Portugal suffered, and been *overthrown by a most terrible Overthrow*, such as one cannot even *think of* without Horror. — I hope it will be a *Warning* to us all.

2. And, that it may be an *effectual* Warning, — you will be pleased to go on with me to the second General Head of my Discourse; and consider seriously with yourselves, that, notwithstanding the Exemption, whether of a few or many, from the *Judgments* which God may inflict, the present Forbearance of the Almighty, is no Security to us for the future. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

LISBON, which is now no more, and is become an *utter Desolation*, was lately, but very lately, as *this* Place now is, an opulent and flourishing City. The Inhabitants thereof were no less secure than we of this City may be; — nor did *they* imagine with themselves, any more than *we* may at this Instant, that their Destruction, their *dire* and *fatal* Destruction, was so nigh at Hand. — They were *planting*, — they were *building*, — they were *marrying and giving in Marriage*, just as we are; when their whole City was destroyed

stroyed; — when the *Earth shook and trembled, under their Feet*, as the *Psalmist* expresses it, *when the Foundations of the Hills moved, and were shaken.*

WERE they *Christians*? — So are *we*. — Were they *Sinners*? — So are *we*. — Did they *deserve* such Treatment? — So do *we*. — Had they been *warned* to their Duty by *repeated* Calls and Admonitions? — So have *we*. — Did they continue *negligent* and *careless* notwithstanding? — So do *we*. — Why then are *we* left behind to bewail their melancholy Situation, and to weep over the Ruins of their once populous City?

THE Question is easily answered, and conveys a most instructive Lesson of *Gratitude*. — It is wholly *to the Lord's Mercies* that we owe our present Safety. — O let not these Mercies be lost upon us, and fail to lead us to Repentance! — They must e'er long be exhausted, should we still persist to abuse them. For *God will not always strive with us; neither will he keep his Mercy for us for ever.*

BUT were the unhappy Sufferers we are alluding to, arrived to *higher* Degrees of Wickedness than *we* are? — Granting they were. — This, my Brethren, is no Argument for *speaking* Peace to ourselves, or thinking *we* shall never be removed, or have Harm happen unto us. — It should rather excite us all to *break off* our Sins immediately, lest

we should soon *fill up the Measure of our Iniquities*; and unhappily rival them in Folly.

BUT were they more *innocent* than we are, and consequently *less deserving* of Punishment? — To our Shame and Confusion be it spoken, it is not in the least improbable. They might be very wicked indeed, and yet be innocent, when compared with the Inhabitants of this Land. — What an affecting Thought is this! Heaven grant we may apply it home to ourselves, and turn it to our best Advantage!

IF God *spared not* those who had *less* to answer for than we have, *take heed lest he also spare not us*. — Consider here the *Goodness and Severity of God*: — *On them which fell, Severity*; — *but, towards us Goodness*; if so be we walk and continue in his *Goodness*: Otherwise we shall also be cut off.

SCARCELY any Blessings are and have been like ours: — The most secure Property; — the most rational Liberty; — the wisest Laws; — the mildest Government; — and the purest Religion in the World. — And these, O thou Fountain of every good and every perfect Gift! — these not fondly to be ascribed to our own feeble Skill and Sagacity, but to thy all-sufficient Bounty, O Lord, *because thou hast a Favour unto us*.

BUT

BUT weigh it well, my Brethren. — It is a most serious Truth, and demands your Attention. — The greater the Blessings are, we enjoy and have enjoyed, the more shall we stand justly condemned, unless we speedily repent and turn to God. — A *continued* Abuse of Favours, must at length destroy us : And, however happy and flourishing we may be *in this our Day*, they *will bring us low* in the End, and render us a very *abject* and *miserable* People. — *The Things which belong to our Peace*, will not always be in our Possession : — They will at last *be hid from our Eyes*.

So they were from the *Jews* of old, in the sad Destruction of *Jerusalem*. — So they have been from *Christians*, at this Time, who dwelt in *Spain* and *Portugal*. — And so we have Cause to fear they will be from *us*, if not wisely and seasonably averted. — For *God's Hand is not shortened*, that it cannot reach this City : — And, who dares say, it will not, should we still *continue* to provoke it?

ANIMADVERT awhile with yourselves upon the *Riches* of the Mercies of God : — What a Variety of Ways he has of calling us to Repentance, and a more serious Turn of Mind?

HE calls us by the *still small Voice of Reason*, to our Duty. — He calls us by the gentle Whispers and Admonitions of *Conscience*. — He calls us even by the Testimony
of

of our own *Senses*, which prove to us the little Satisfaction, the Emptiness, I should rather say, and Vanity, of all that this World can give.

WHEN these Arguments fail, as they too often do, he calls us by a Display of his *Mercies*; — by Health, — by Prosperity, — by blessing us with Friends, and protecting us from our Enemies. — But, if these have no Influence over us, and we are lost to all Sense of *Gratitude*, — he then calls us by *Severity*; — by Sickness and Adversity, — by the Death of our Relations and Friends, — by exposing us to Troubles, Disappointments, and Losses.

FROM these, — if these have no Power to move us, — he proceeds after all to *Judgments*. — He calls us by the loud and awakening Summons of the *Pestilence*, the *Famine*, and the *Sword*; — nay more, by *instantaneous* Ruin and Confusion upon a sinful People. — Thus the Almighty *calls*; — thus he utters his Voice to a careless World. — And shall we not *bear*? — Shall we still be *deaf* to his Voice, — to his *repeated* Voice? — Shall we never *awake* from our Dream, — our Dream of Vice and Folly?

THE Time may come, — O let it not be *always* absent from our Minds! — when our Lord will say unto us as he said unto his Disciples, — *Sleep on now and take your Rest*; behold, it is too late to repent, — your Day of Grace is over,
— the

—the Door of Salvation is shut, and you knock in vain.
 —Then may we *call upon* God, but he in his Turn, *will not answer us*; — *then may we seek him, but shall not find him*; for that we bated Knowledge, and did not choose the Fear of the Lord.

MAY God, of his infinite Mercy, grant, that we may all of us be found watching; — *that our Lord may not come in a Day when we look not for him, and in an Hour that we are not aware of*; and cut us asunder, and appoint us our Portion with the Hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.

F I N I S.



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